



MAIT TIL THEY GET A LOAD OF THIS!

Of course, by now you probably have. The latest incarnation of the Dark Knight retains the trademarked moodiness, but spices it up with bright lights, incredible production design, and some top performances. We hate to gush, but it's superb entertainment. To see how it was done, Matt Bielby spoke to Batman Forever's producer, Peter Macgregor-Scott, and Dave Golder chatted to production designer Barbara Ling. Next stop, Gotham City!

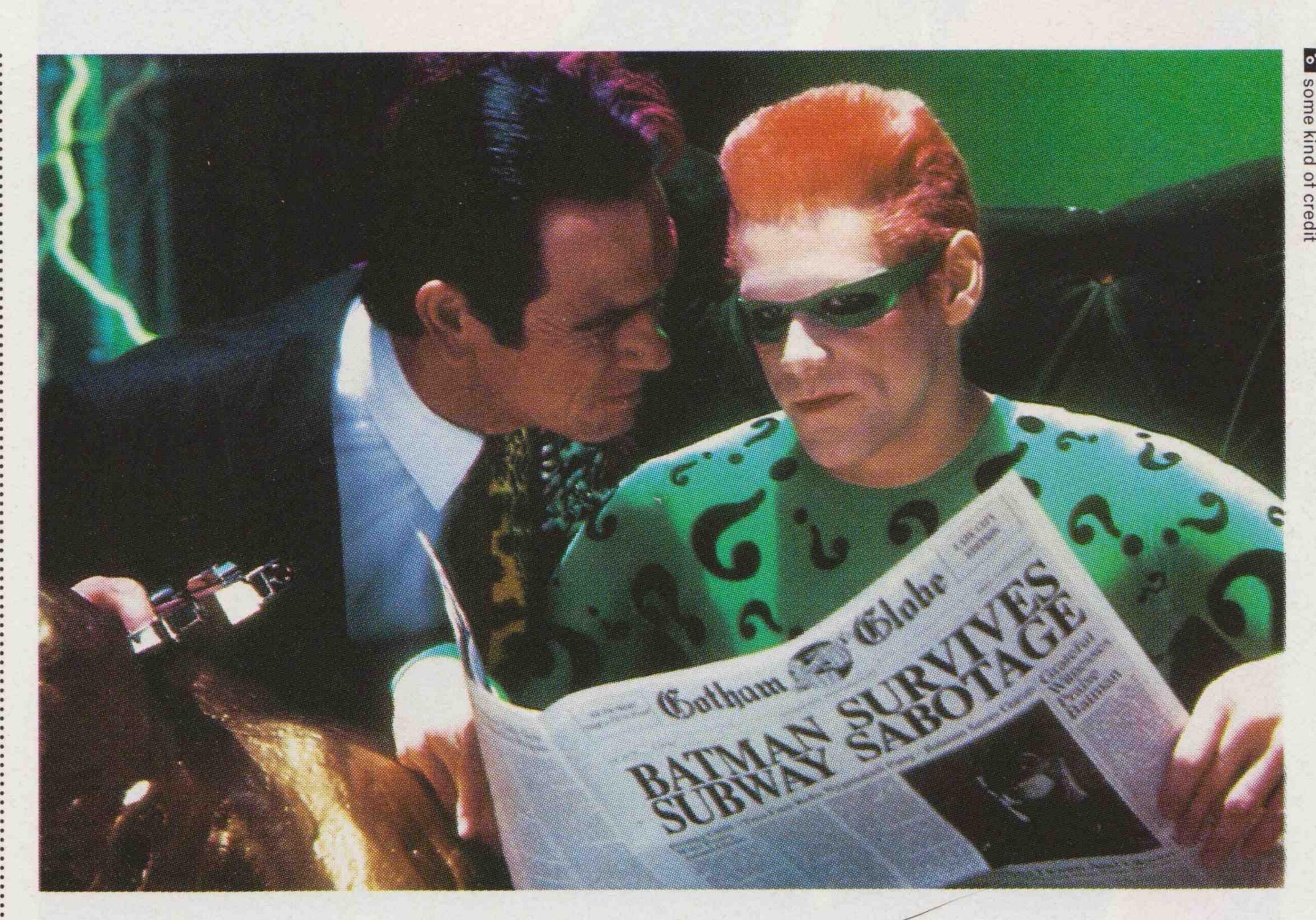
hat Batman Forever hasn't received universal critical praise seems to us at SFX to be one of the mysteries – nay, riddles – of the year. "Soulless," some call it, but we have to disagree. After all, doesn't it take us much further into the psychology of Bruce Wayne than any previous Batman film, with the possible exception of the animated Mask of the Phantasm? "Thinly plotted," they cry – and sorry, but we have to take exception here too. We get the origins of both Robin

have to take exception here too. We get the origins of both Robin and The Riddler, a neat Lois and Clark-style love-triangle, The Riddler's master-plan to become the smartest man in Gotham City, and some understanding of what's going on behind Two-Face's warped visage to boot – surely enough plot for two movies?

But they don't stop there. "Hectic," "demented", "unrestrained" moan the nay-sayers – and for once we have to agree. Sure the film moves at an incredible pace – one American reviewer described it as "a two-hour movie that goes by in 14 seconds" – but isn't that a good thing? This is a superhero film we're talking about, after all...



The Batmobile powers through Gotham – not a set but New York City, redressed for the film. "Taking things to the streets is the only way I work," says producer Peter Macgregor-Scott.

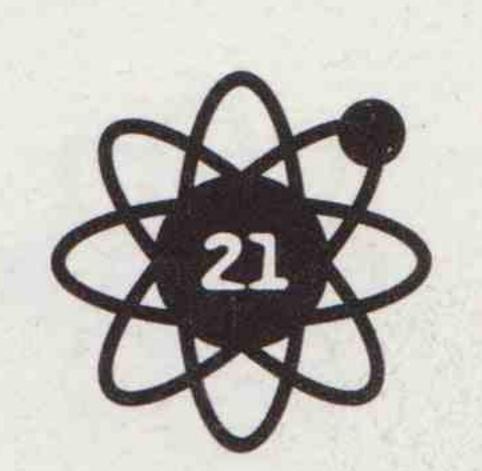


If Michael Keaton got blown off the screen by Jack Nicholson, what chance does Val Kilmer have against two of the biggest scene-stealers around? Actually, you'd be surprised...

Still, at least everyone seems to agree about one thing – *Batman Forever* looks incredible. For the first time, we see Gotham City as it was meant to be seen – the use of real streets opens things up brilliantly, the incredible CGI and model work creating an amazing alternative New York, three times the height of the real thing, and covered in incredible art deco detail. New Bat-equipment, a great script, plus some scenery-chewing performances crank up the fun factor all the way.

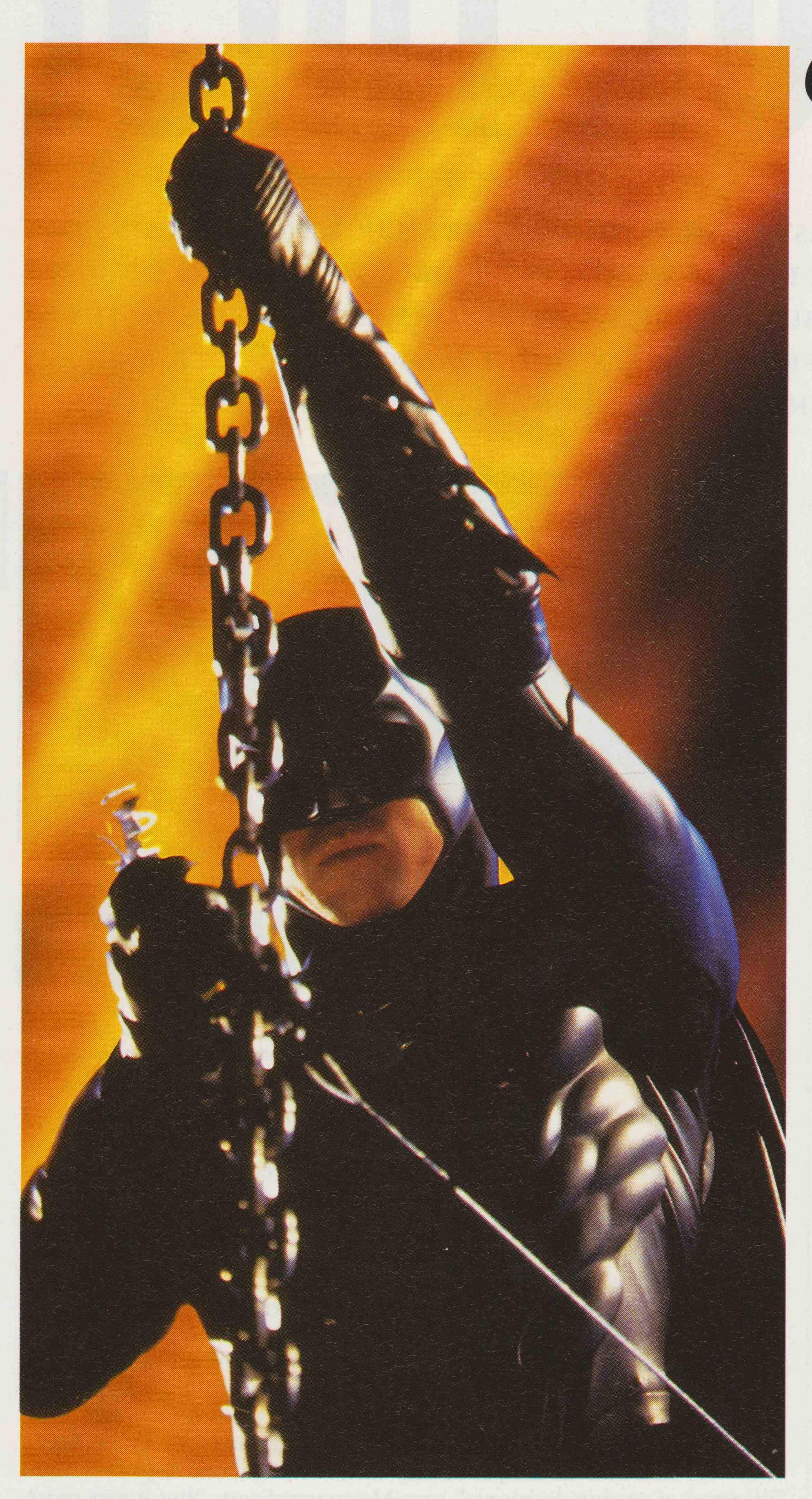
But how has such success come about – particularly in the light of the film's moody, less satisfying predecessors? To find out, SFX spoke to Peter Macgregor-Scott – ex-patriot British producer of the new Batman – and the film's remarkable production designer, Barbara Ling. One thing's certain – this new movie has little to do with previous Batdirector Tim Burton, despite the producer's credit he takes on the film.

"We sent him the scripts as they came through, and kept him informed of casting decisions," says Macgregor-Scott, "but it was more as a matter of record than anything else. I only saw him once!"



"RIDDLE ME THIS, RIDDLE ME THAT, WHO'S AFRAID OF THE BIG BLACK BAT?"

Who indeed? Certainly not Bat-producer Peter Macgregor-Scott, who – with director Joel Schumacher – was asked to reinvent Warner's most successful film franchise. "And a bloody good job they did too," mutters an impressed **Matt Bielby**, "much as I hate to admit it..."



Val Kilmer is the new-look Batman, a more convincing superhero than the bravely-playing-against-type Keaton. "He was the only guy we considered," claims Macgregor-Scott.

arner very much wanted a new Batman," says Peter Macgregor-Scott, British producer of such films as Steve Seagal's *Under Siege* and *The Fugitive*, and one of the guiding lights behind the new *Batman*. "They'd made two with Tim Burton, but there was concern that the second, in particular, was too dark. There'd been a certain backlash against that way of doing things, so the plan was to maintain the integrity of what had gone before, but make it much more fun."

And that's exactly what they've done. The new Bat-team have kept the best bits from the previous films, but added elements from all the other versions of the character too – the '60s TV show, the old Bob Kane comics, the animated series, even Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*. Val Kilmer makes a much more obvious Bats too...

"Yeah!" says Macgregor-Scott. "Michael Keaton had decided he didn't want to do the role any more, and as far as Joel Schumacher and myself were concerned, Val was the only guy to replace him – he has the perfect combination of being able to handle Bruce Wayne really well, and be phenomenal as Batman."

He seems much less screwed up than the Keaton Batman too... "Well, Val Kilmer brought a certain sanity and intelligence to the thing that immediately made it different to the on-edge Keaton version. In our film, he's more of a slightly troubled guy than a genuinely disturbed one. And Val's a big fella – he's six foot one, six two, and around 200 pounds – so he really looks the part too."

Tim Burton didn't have much to do with the film at all, did he? It certainly doesn't feel like the sort of thing he'd have done...

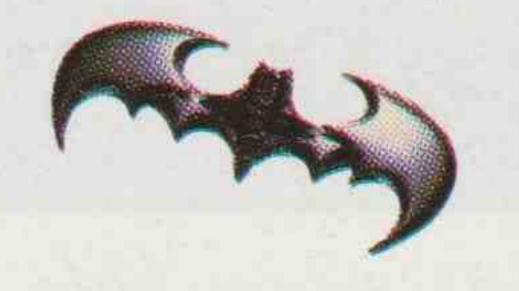
"No, it probably isn't," Macgregor-Scott agrees. "The whole movie is designed to be much more accessible than the first two. It's brighter and brasher and much more action-packed. That said, I think Tim's quite happy with the end result."

It certainly looks a lot less studio-bound than most Tim Burton films. A decision was obviously made early on to take as much of the action as possible out into the real world. Why was that?

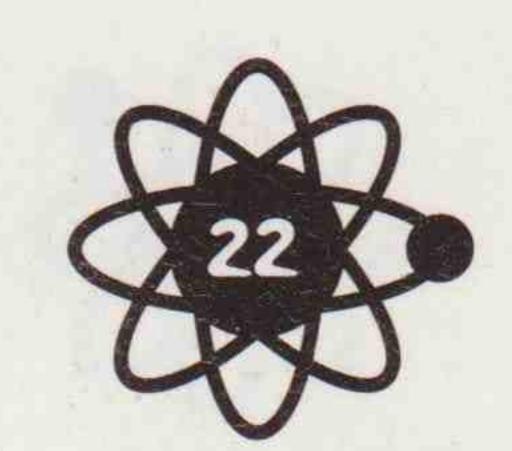
"Well, taking things onto the streets is really the only way I work," Macgregor-Scott explains. "My philosophy is, 'If you can't shoot it for real, shoot as much as you can, then fix in whatever's missing with miniatures, or digitally, or whatever.' New York gave us a great starting point – having the Batmobile go down Wall Street at 100 miles an hour can't be beat! – though we obviously brought in a lot of set-dressing, statues and so on, to make everything look more Gotham. I think, in the end, we spent eight days shooting in New York, and a few days doing other stuff on the streets of Los Angeles too."

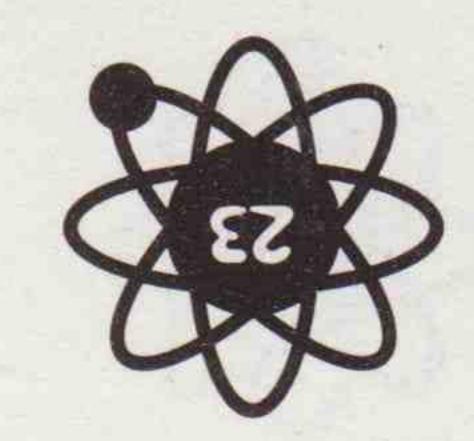
What are the advantage of shooting "for real?" Presumably, you don't have as much control as you would have in the studio...

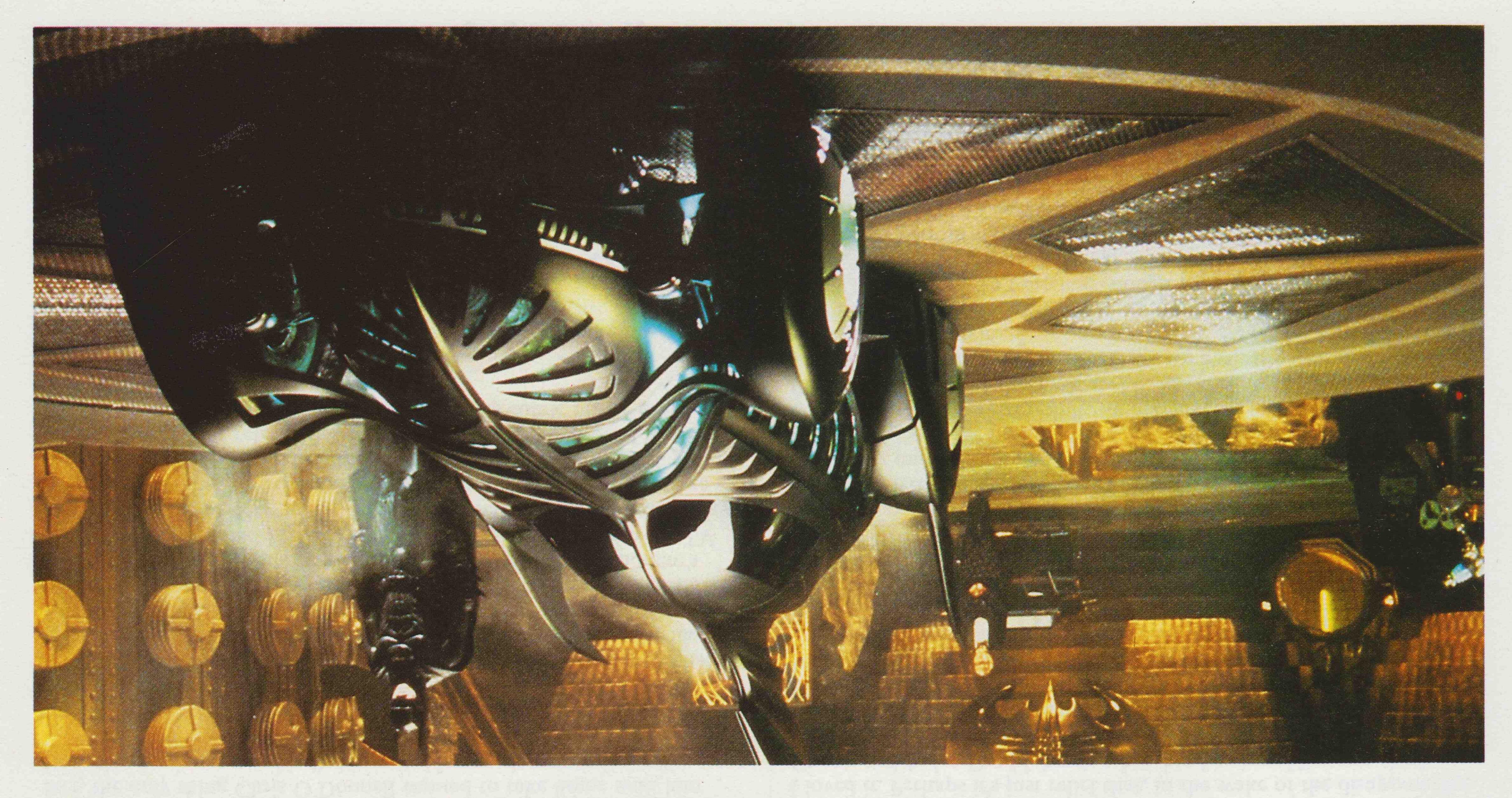
"No, but I think movies shot completely in a studio suffer from a certain claustrophobia. You just feel too closed in, which I think was a big problem with the second *Batman* film. When you're outside, you're actually in a real place, and there are all sorts of things going on around you. It makes a real difference."



WE TALK ABOUT THE CASTING FOR A WHILE - SOMETHING WE BOTH agree is one of the real strong points of the film, from the new Batman,







Peter Macgregor-Scott, producer

hour can't be beatin Street at 100 miles an Batmobile go down V starting point – having the "Mew York gave us a great

Certainly, Joel and I knew we wanted Robin personally think they should have done it. whispers Macgregor-Scott, conspiratorially, "and I talk about introducing Robin in the second film," "You might not know this, but there was actually some very easy for him to come across looking kind of stupid...

mean, he's not the most popular character with all Bat-fans, and it'd be

How did the decision to include Robin in the film come about? I our solution was just to turn the cameras on and let it fly." morning to out-act Tommy Lee Jones. At the end of the day, though, - and, of course, you're going to have to get up pretty early in the things out by making sure Batman had the very best role he's had so far Carrey. You can't really avoid it. That said, we did our best to balance does he get those wonderful toys?, and I think it's the same with Jim think of the first Batman, you think of Jack Nicholson saying, Where "Well, villains always get the juice. I mean, you're right – when you

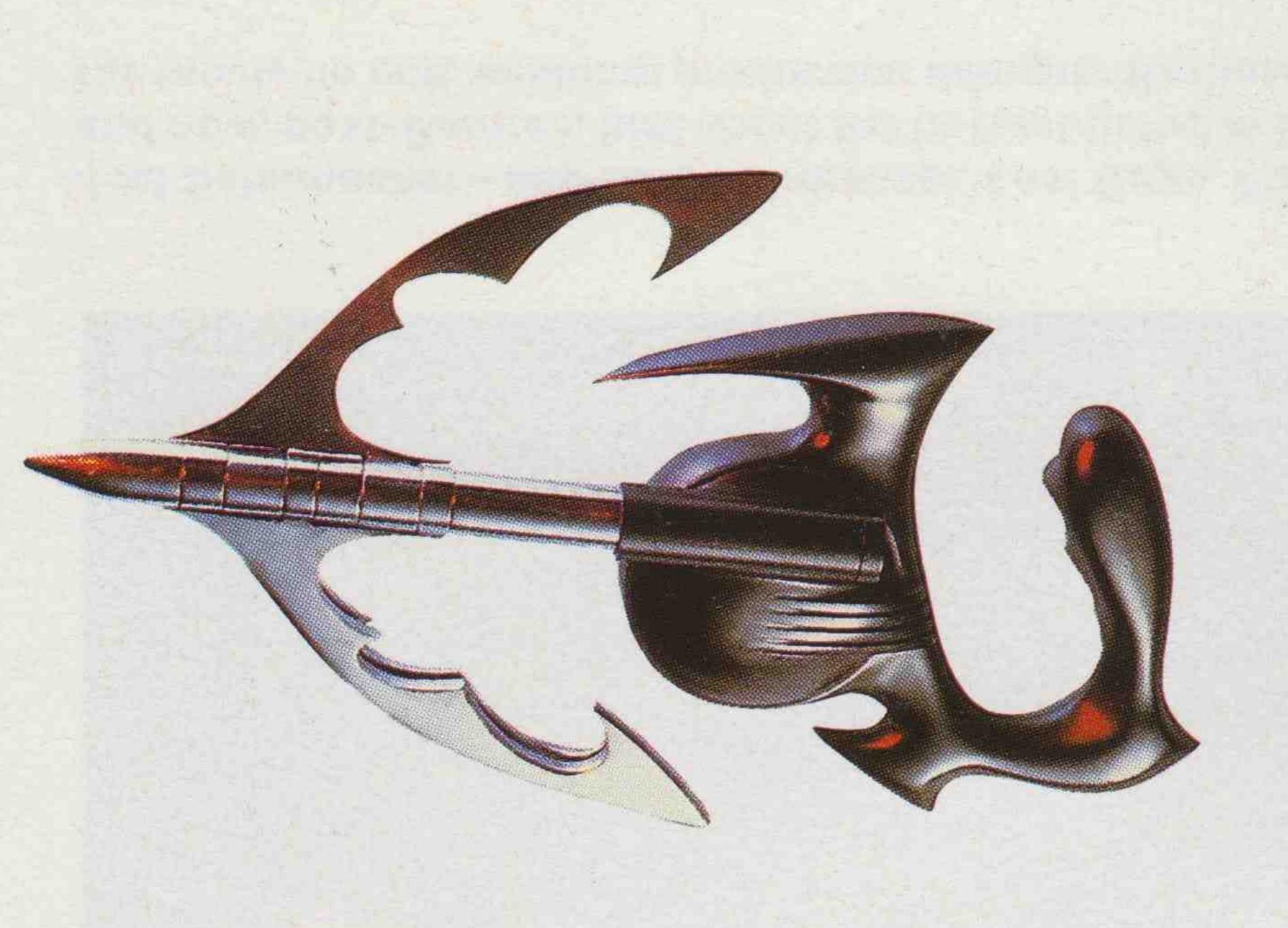
the film, just like Jack Nicholson did with the first one...

A lot of people have said they think Jim Carrey walks away with the guy. With Robin this would have been a totally different movie..." back to back. But anyway, in the end we decided Jim Carrey simply was Doubtfire, and I think he was reluctant to do two huge comedic roles Robin Williams play The Riddler, but Robin had just completed Mrs Carrey was, of course, a godsend. Originally, Joel was keen to have

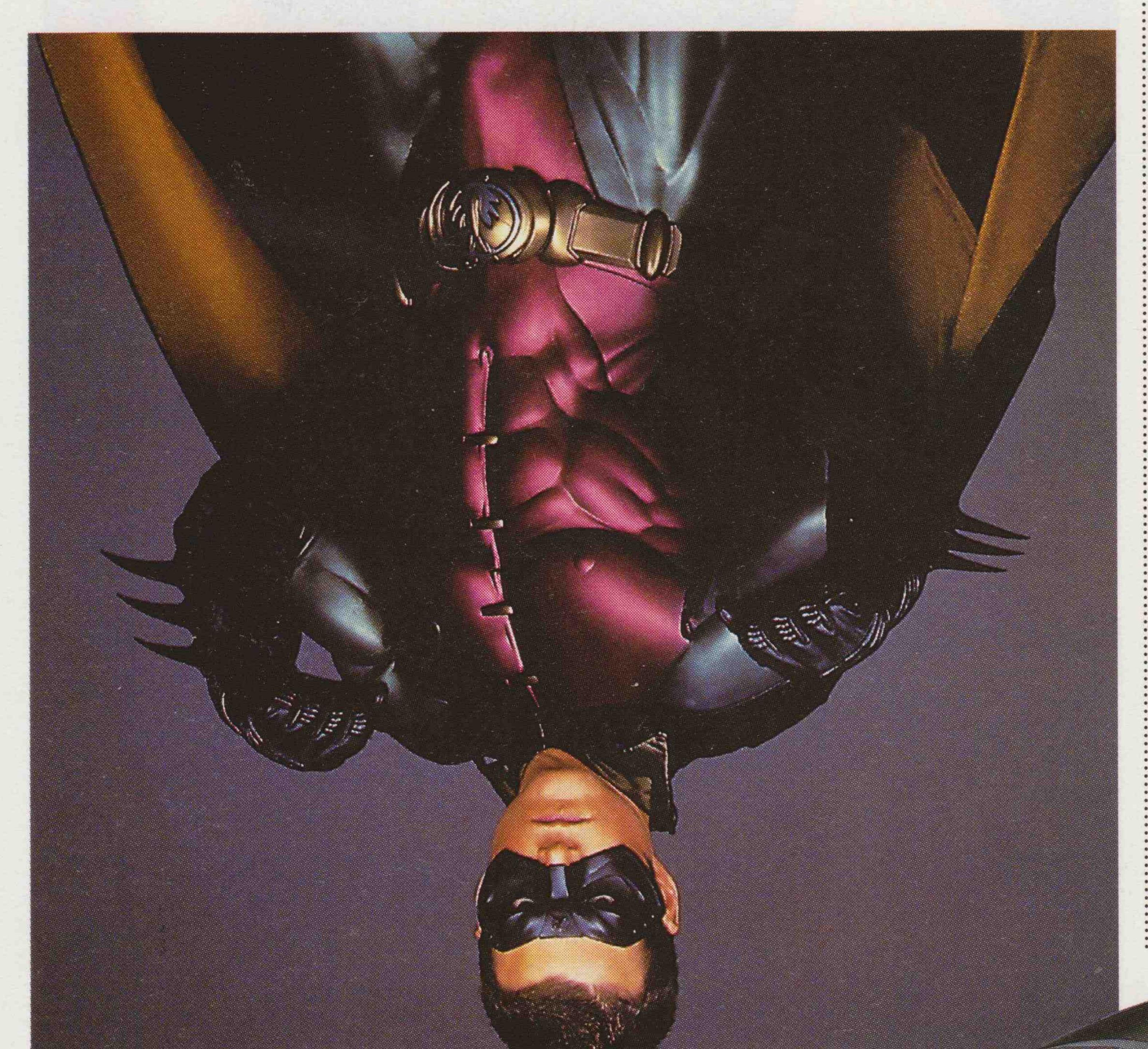
"Yeah, we were very lucky with the casting" he laughs. "Jim significant character gets at least one or two really good moments... dialogue – Batman Forever seems carefully designed to make sure every and steals almost every scene. Not that he's the only one with cracking faithful butler, Alfred, is particularly fine, for instance, character parts. Michael Gough as Bruce Wayne's through the mega-star villains, right down to the

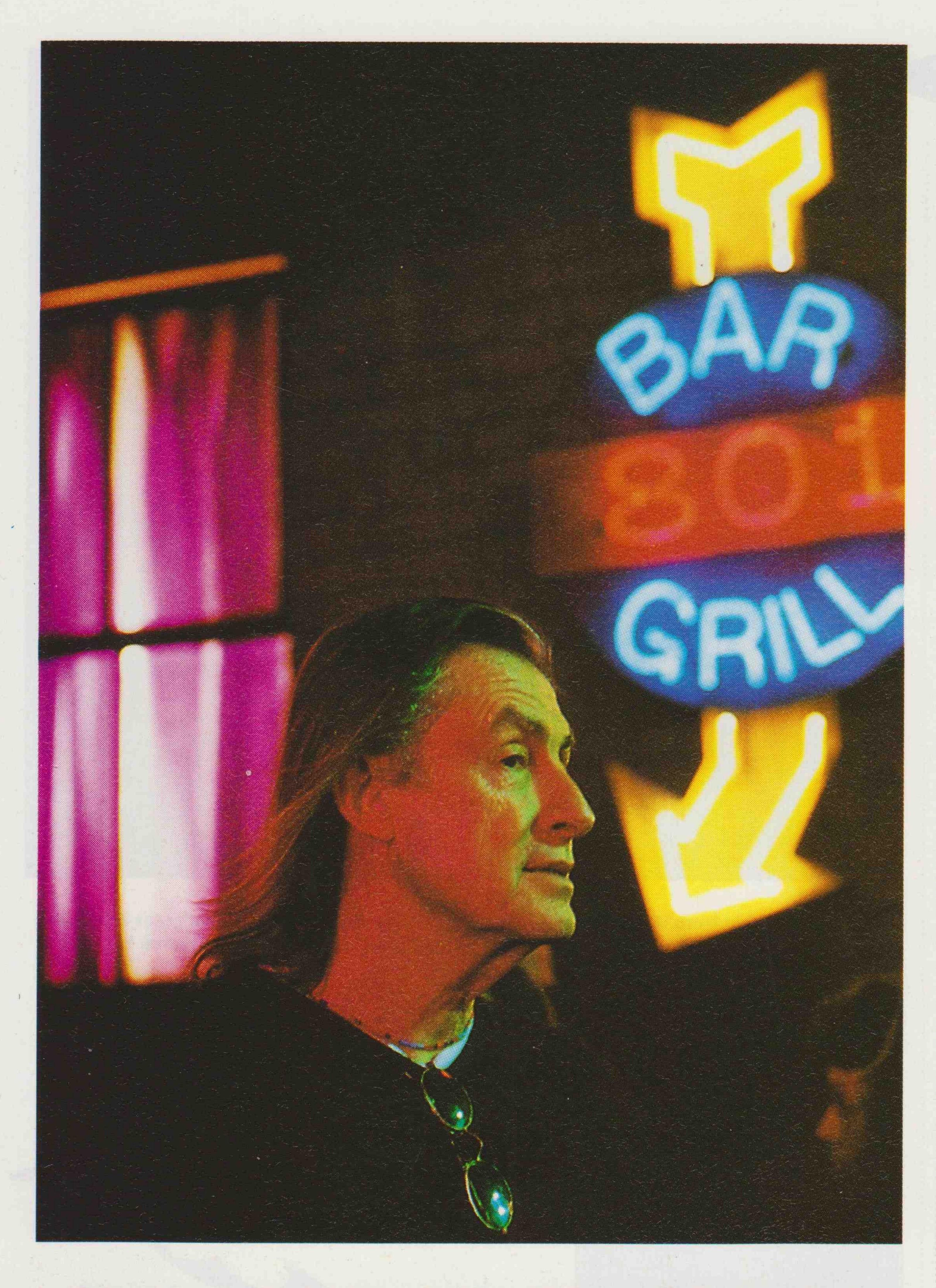


(below). What more could you ask for? all new Bat-equipment (above) and a great new car All new villains (The Riddler, left, looking saucy),



and it means you've got two villains and two heroes." Yeah, and his new costume is great. "We wanted Robin from the beginning," enthuses Macgregor-Scott. "He's a great character,





Joel Schumacher – one-time hairdresser, Lost Boys, Flatliners and Falling Down director, and now, post-Batman, just about the hottest ticket in Hollywood. His design sense helped the movie no end, enabling production designer Barbara Ling to really run with her ideas.

right from the beginning. He's a great character, and it means you've got two villains and two heroes. And his costume is so cool too – in fact, the only thing Chris O'Donnell wanted to take home with him from the movie set was his Robin suit. He was desperate for it."

Chris O'Donnell does a little "Holy-something, Batman!" joke at one point – a reference to the '60s TV show – doesn't he? And there are all sorts of other little in-jokes there for fans to pick up on too...

"Oh, you liked that, did you? There's a reference to Metropolis in there as well, and another to Michele Pfeiffer's Catwoman – the idea was to provide a constant layering, where little tributes to earlier versions of *Batman* keep cropping up. There's even a bit of a *Lois and Clark* TV show-type interaction going on between Nicole Kidman's character, Batman and Bruce Wayne. In fact, Dean Cain from the TV show was going to come over to the set dressed as Superman for a day to meet Val in his Batman outfit, but it never happened. Would have been great, though, wouldn't it?"

TV and movie references you might have expected, but I was pleased to see there are lots of references to the comic books too.

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Peter Macgregor-Scott, producer

There's been plenty of talk about how the bright primary colours used in *Batman Forever* are meant to reflect the colours of the old comics. What I thought was more interesting, though, was that there are whole scenes directly lifted from landmark Batman issues...

"You're right," he says. "We had comics kicking around all the time. Bob Kane, the creator of Batman, is, of course, still around, and we looked at a lot of his stuff – we had storyboards with comic images on them made up for constant reference. And Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* was definitely a huge influence – the scene where the young Bruce Wayne falls into what becomes the Batcave, and sees a giant bat flying at him, was taken directly from *The Dark Knight*."



KEEPING TABS ON A MASSIVE PRODUCTION LIKE BATMAN FOREVER must surely take it out of you – after all, Tim Burton was apparently burnt out on the character after two of them, and felt he didn't anything to offer a third. With the success of *Batman Forever*, a fourth film is inevitable, so the question has to be this: Do you guys feel like you've got another one in you?

"Oh yeah," he says, muttering something about if he'd known how much work *Batman Forever* was going to be, he might never have got involved in the first place. "We've all got one more inside us. After all, there are plenty of Batman baddies left, and it's a hell of a lot of fun making a *Batman* movie. You've got this huge sandpit, with all the toys in the world, and there are no limits to what you can do with them. I mean, you can say, 'Okay, let's do a car chase,' and when somebody says, 'How about if the car goes up the side of the building?' you can just go with it – provided you can afford it, of course..."

Batman's such an icon now – everyone knows who he is, which gives a film like this an obvious advantage over something like, say, *Judge Dredd*. But what do you think it is about Batman that keeps us coming back to him? Is it just that he's been around since 1939, and we're all so familiar with him?

"Well, partly – but mainly it's just that Batman's such a wonderful character. The guy is the ultimate hero. He's a human being who dresses up in a suit at night, and goes out to fight crime as a bat. It doesn't get much better than that! And he's intriguing – here's a guy who has millions and millions of dollars in his daytime world, yet he's still driven to fight crime at great personal risk. Why's he doing it? What drives him? It's just perfect."



This has been a tricky interview, to be honest. I know I've been gushing rather, but I saw the film the night before I spoke to Peter, and I loved it. Perhaps it's just relief that, in the wake of the disappointing Congo and Judge Dredd, here's a big, big Summer SF movie that's actually worth going to see. There are lots of great bits to the film – lots of things I really enjoyed – but what, I wondered, was most pleasing from the film-maker's point of view? What, for Peter Macgregor-Scott, really stands out?

"I think if I had to choose just one thing," he says, after some deliberation, "it'd have to be that the movie's quite seamless. We're mixing live photography with special effects all the time, but the film just sweeps you along so fast you don't have time to try and figure out 'How did they do that?"

My favourite thing, for what it's worth, is the production design. I mean, the Batmobile looked good in the first couple of films, but here it's simply mindblowing...

"Yeah, well we originally made four or five models for different ways to go with the Batmobile, all about three feet long, and brought them together for Joel to look at. He was walking around them, and he said, 'Boys – we still don't have it.' So we basically threw everything out and started again..."

And the problem was?

"They just weren't organic enough for Joel. The car we've ended up with has quite a unique design – it's like a body in some ways, with a rib cage, and through the gaps you can see the insides. It's kind of like something HR Giger would come up with."

That's just about all we've got room for. Is there anything else you'd like to say about Batman Forever before we go?

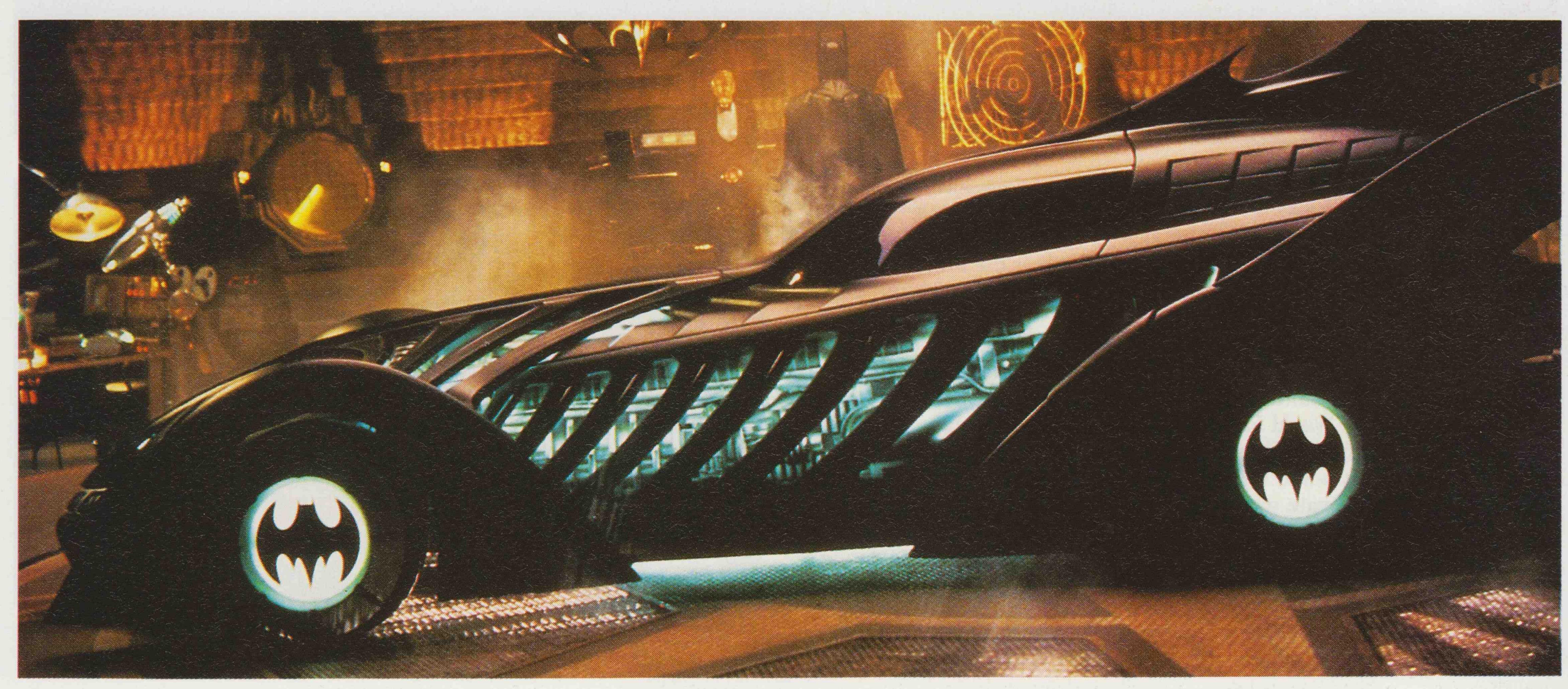
"Just that we were very lucky," he smiles, "We had the best people working on this at almost every level, and an amazing cast. I mean, if you've got Jim Carrey, you just want to put 1,000 feet in the camera and watch him do his stuff. But when you've got him and Tommy Lee Jones together, you just know the screen's going to be on fire."



"IT'S THE CAR, RIGHT? CHICKS LOVE THE CAR..."

And, if they've got any sense, they'll like the rest of it too. Gotham City is dead. Long live Gotham City. The old, gloomy, rather theatrical stomping ground of Tim Burton's acclaimed Dark Knight has been replaced by a bizarre, kaleidoscopic fusion of architectural styles, thousands of feet tall, and packed with massive statues.

Dave Golder wants to have production designer Barbara Ling's babies...



Designer Ling was adamant the new Batmobile should have a fin to give it a Bat-profile.

"We wanted to design
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Barbara Ling, production designer

the gadgets..."

ome people ask for trouble. Whatever your opinion on Tim Burton's first Batman movie, the one thing everybody agreed on was the high quality of Anton Furst's Gothic production design – this wasn't the camp Caped Crusader anymore, but the trendier, gloomier Dark Knight, and all the better for it. Later – after Furst's tragic suicide – Bo Welch stepped in to design the second film in the same style. The philosophy

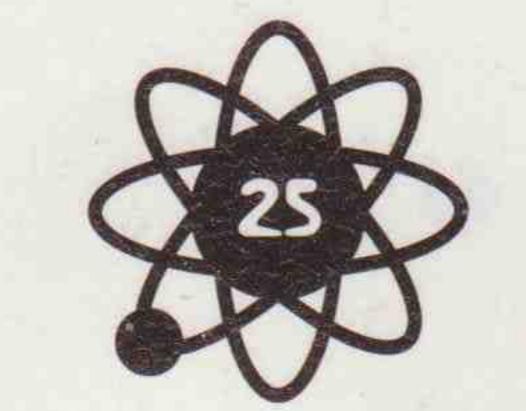
seemed to be, 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it' – and why not? Of all the many changes made for the third film, it was the decision to rejig the look of Batman that worried fans the most.

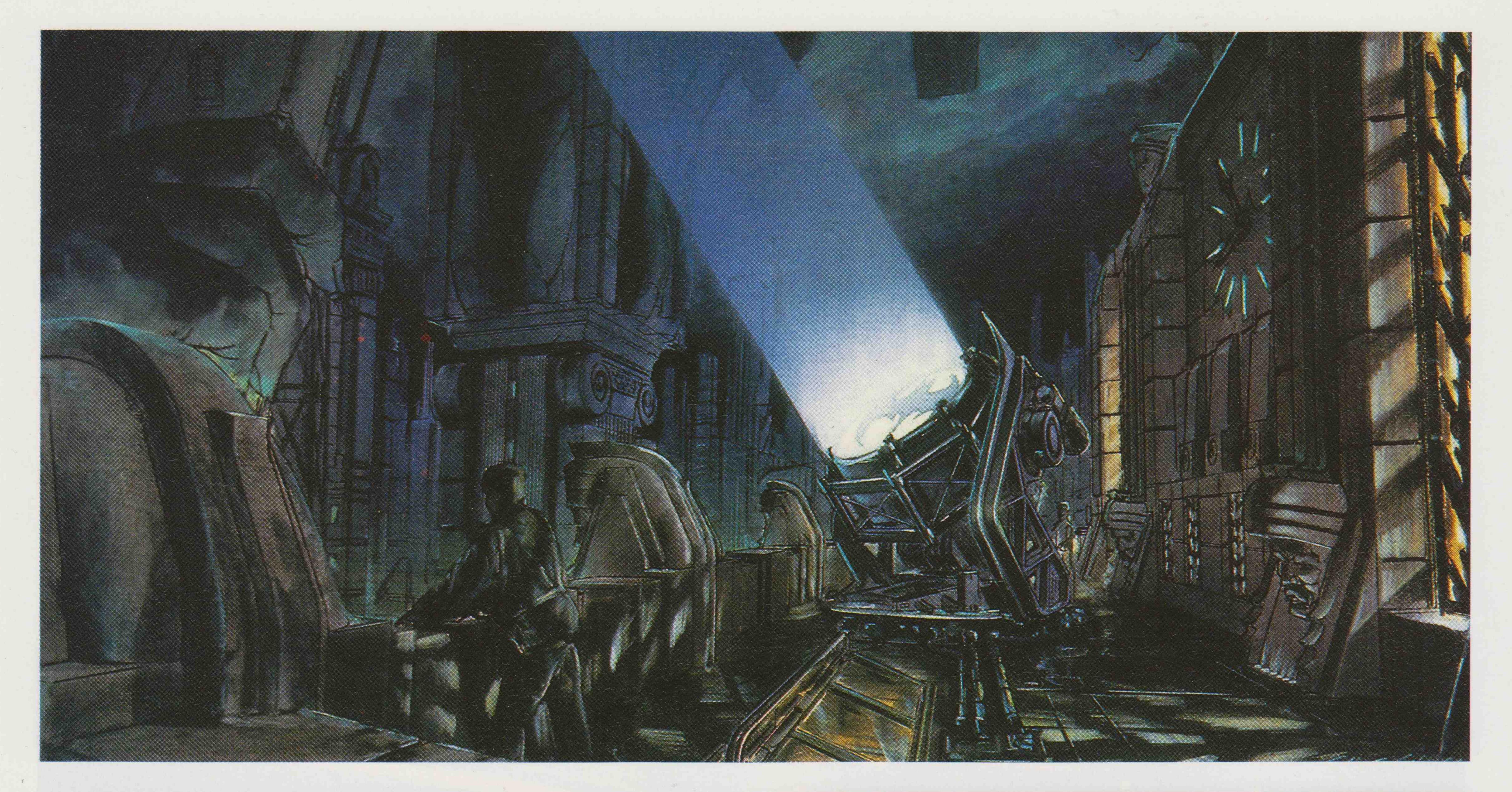
So why change a winning formula? One obvious answer is that if you don't move forwards, you're actually going backwards, and even the best designs in the world need rethinking from time to time. The other is that new production designer Barbara Ling wanted to. When director Joel Schumacher offered her the job, she agreed, on the proviso that "We're going to do our own version, right?"



WITH SCHUMACHER IN COMPLETE AGREEMENT, BARBARA LING SET about redesigning everything – from the Bat-gadgets to the sets – so that nothing from the previous movies remained. The first question, then, is obvious: Why make life so difficult for yourself?

"It was mine and Joel's decision," she tells me. "My feeling is that the excitement of the comic book comes from the fact that with \alpha





The pre-production illustrations, which were painted by a team of illustrations from Ling's original rough sketches, were more for marketing purposes than help with the set design.

every illustrator new ideas come out. I mean, look at the Frank Miller stuff next to early Bob Kane – it's stunningly different. So why not do that with the movies?"

And Gotham City's certainly changed – now it looks somewhere between a Pet Shop Boys video and Cecil B DeMille's *Intolerance*, dominated by massive buildings and skyscraper-sized statues.

"I was going for World Fair proportions," explains Ling, "a real mixture of architecture. It's kind of Russian constructivist designs mixed with Japanese futurism and a little bit of German art deco. I was fusing them all together to create what I call a new Gothic, or something. I was trying to create a monumental rather than claustrophobic city."

And monumental it most certainly is – very unlike her other design work in more naturalistic movies like David Byrne's *True Stories* (her first film), *Making Mr Right*, *Fried Green Tomatoes* and *The Doors*. Strangely enough, it was working with Schumacher on the "real life" *Falling Down* that eventually led to her involvement with *Batman*.



OF COURSE, DESIGNING BATMAN ISN'T JUST A CASE OF PENCILLING A few buildings. In fact, the cityscape is just the tip of the iceberg. A new Batmobile was needed, for a start – and a new Batcave. "We wanted to design Batman's world first," she explains, "so there was an overall

sense of the Bat in the movie. Then we could move to the other stuff, like the gadgets. Everything had to have one design stamp, as if Batman and Alfred had built it all."

A more practical reason for cracking on with the car, however, was the time factor. "I knew it was going to take a long time to build the Batmobile – and it did. We went through some tremendous models before we settled on the final one

So what kind of an effect were you aiming for?

"The single fin was very

- after about seven months!"



The schizophrenic nature of Harvey Two-Face is reflected in Linn's early design for his hideout, which is pretty much identical to the finished version seen in the movie.

important to me, I remember. I loved the idea of it reflecting from the side in the shape of a bat. All four Batmobiles we did models of had the big fin on top."

Working with illustrator Tim Flannery, who provided her with some much needed auto-design knowledge, Ling decided that the movie's lighting would be another major factor in the car's design.

"What I really wanted to do was find a way to get it to illuminate itself. The biggest problem with a black car, especially when it's out at night, is that it's difficult to see. That's why having the illumination coming from the inside became very important. Illuminating the ribs was difficult, though – we had to have tiny neon lights everywhere."

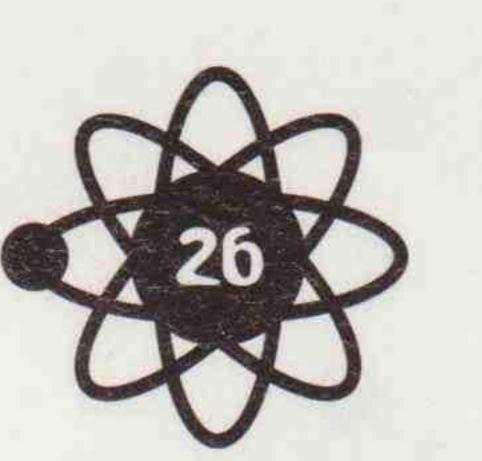
The wheels were another case of Ling making life hard for herself. "I was determined to have the logo on the hub caps static, so the Bats remained upright the whole time – except you can't do that, because it's so tough on the wheel bearings, apparently. But eventually we figured it out."

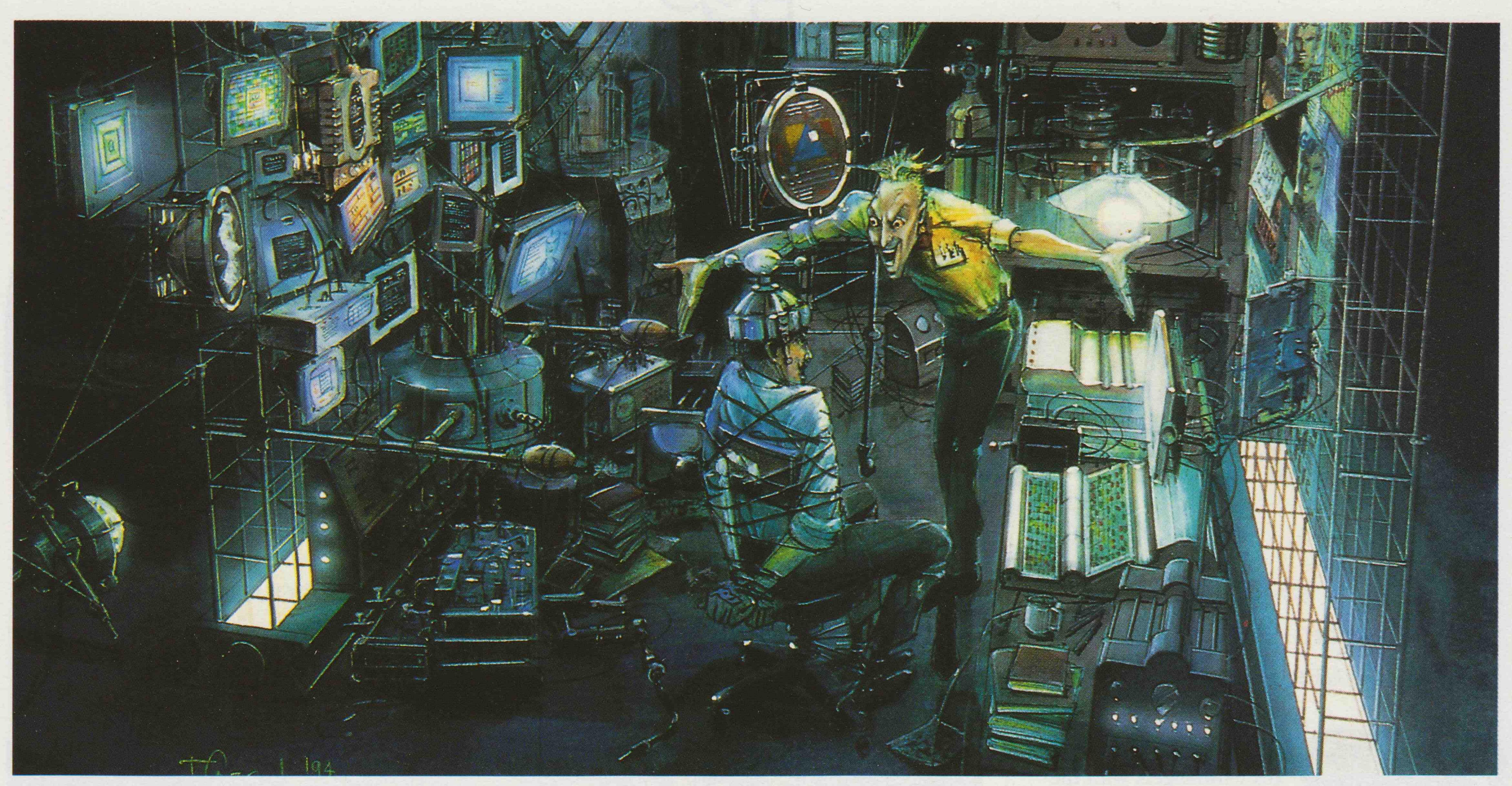
So is the car roadworthy, or is it just a movie prop?

"Oh, sure it's roadworthy. It's got a 350 cubic inch [about 5.7 litres – Ed] Chevy small-block engine, and a carbon fibre body so it's light, and it can open up to about 120mph. We did a lot of testing out in the desert – the boys had it up to about 100, at least, with more to come."



SIMPLY HAVING THE TIME TO DO EVERYTHING REQUIRED IS ONE OF THE main bugbears with a film of this size, as Barbara Ling soon





Ling reluctantly had to let go of her "beautiful collection" of pre-production paintings – they're now to go on show in a special *Batman* museum built at the Warner studios.

discovered... Early on in production, for instance, she was asked to produce a set of huge pre-production paintings...

"The marketing on this movie was big," she says, "And we had a problem, because they needed a lot in advance, but I didn't have time to sit down and do the paintings.

So what I'd do is rough the things out, then get all these illustrators to do them for me."

For practical design purposes, Ling opted to build models of most of the sets, rather than use the paintings.

"I'm a big fan of building models to show to directors," she says. "It doesn't matter how beautifully you build something if they only shoot one corner of it – not that that doesn't happen, of course, no matter how hard you try to avoid it."

Even more annoying is not being able to build your favourite set... "Yeah, in the comics there's Arkham Square, which is kind of the Las Vegas of Gotham. And we had a whole sequence set there, with huge 3D signs. We'd developed that quite a way – it was like Vegas gone insane, where everywhere you looked there would be a madcap mixture of signs. There was going to be a very big effects action sequence set there, but they did rewrites and it was gone..."



BATMAN FOREVER IS THE FIRST OF THE RECENT BATFILMS TO USE extensive location footage, something Schumacher and Ling agreed to go with very early on...

"That's right," she says. "I wanted to do an enormous amount in New York, especially in the Wall Street Area, because of the sense of 'canyon' you get there. You can't really build those kind of proportions on a backlot..."

But, as Ling points out, these "real" shots rarely go undoctored.

"I think what's very exciting is when you start with real architecture, then matte in miniatures and computer-generated objects on top of it. We combined real streets with computer architecture a lot in the movie, and that way you can get really vast, believable vistas that wouldn't be physically possible, either in a studio or on a real street."

It all sounds a logistic nightmare - was it?

"No, it was actually great fun!" she laughs. "I loved working with [effects supervisor] John Dykstra and the CGI people. It's fabulous to see them creating beautiful 3D compositions from your roughs."

Researching the Bat-mythology was no chore for Ling either, who is a self-confessed Batfan: "Even before Batman Forever, I had access to

"Even before Batman
Forever came along, I had access to very rare Batman comics from my childhood.

By the time I started on the movie I think I'd

read every Batman comic ever done!"

Barbara Ling, production designer

very rare Batman comics from my childhood. By the time I started on the movie I think I'd read every Batman comic ever done!"

One particular influence, as mentioned, was Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* series – surprising, perhaps, because it was the very series that inspired the dark, moody look of the first two movies.

"But in *The Dark Knight*," argues Ling, "there are also these incredible washes of colour. The panels were actually often very vivid and beautiful, and that's the colour sensibility we used in our film."

Indeed, the film is almost colour-coded, each character and situation being assigned specific colours for their costumes, domains and lighting. Two-Face is red, black and magenta, for instance, while Batman's all steel blues, cobalt and purples.

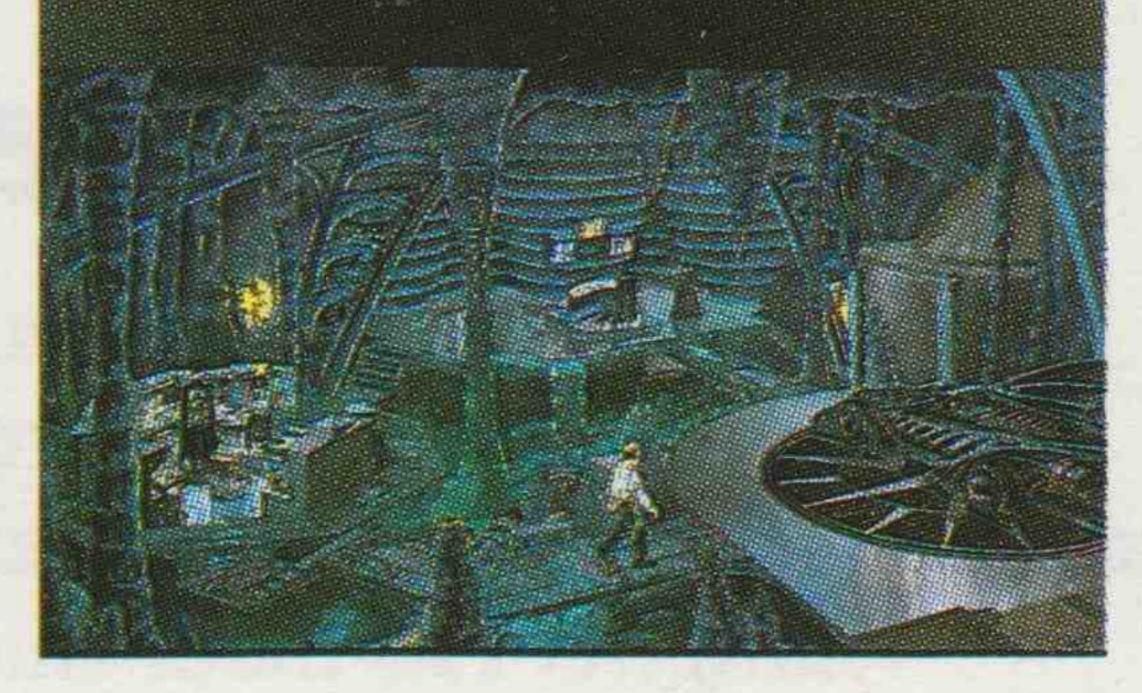
After a year and ten months with "a head full of Batstuff," Ling is now taking a few months off. But having changed the face of Gotham City, how would she feel about some new designer coming along in a

film or two and starting from scratch?

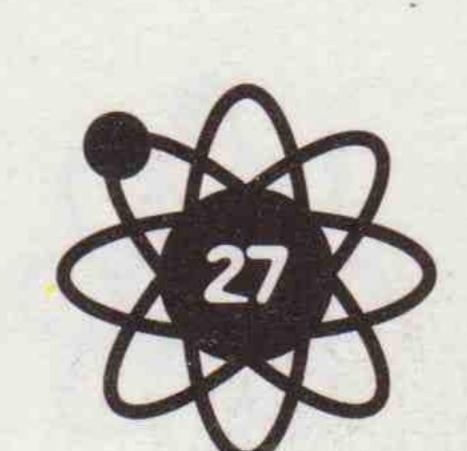
"That'd be great!" she says energetically.

"I think it'll be very exciting to see what

happens to it next..."



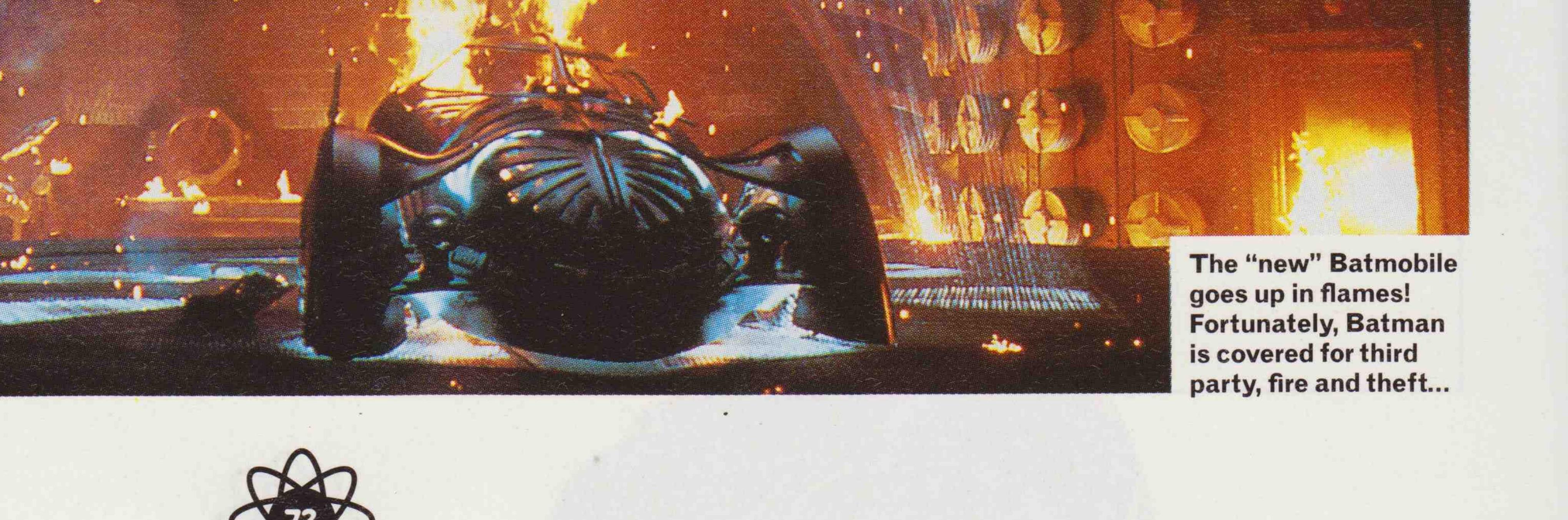
Batman Forever is now on general release, and reviewed on page 72. And we dribble over it just as embarrassingly there too...





"What Joel Schumacher has done is to successfully combine the original Dark Knight with the OTT camp hero of the '60s TV series. 'It'll never work!' you cry. But it does, I assure you..."

The third instalment has more going for it than the previous two films put together!



Batstudio: Warner Bros
Batdirector: Joel Schumacher
Starring: Val Kilmer, Tommy Lee Jones, Jim
Carrey, Nicole Kidman, Chris O'Donnell

Batcert: **PG**Running bat-time: **122 mins**Release: **Now showing**

Bat-text: MJ Simpson

Alfred's "Can I persuade you to take a sandwich with you, Sir?" – it's clear that this is a distinct move away from Tim Burton's Batman movies.

And, indeed, it is.

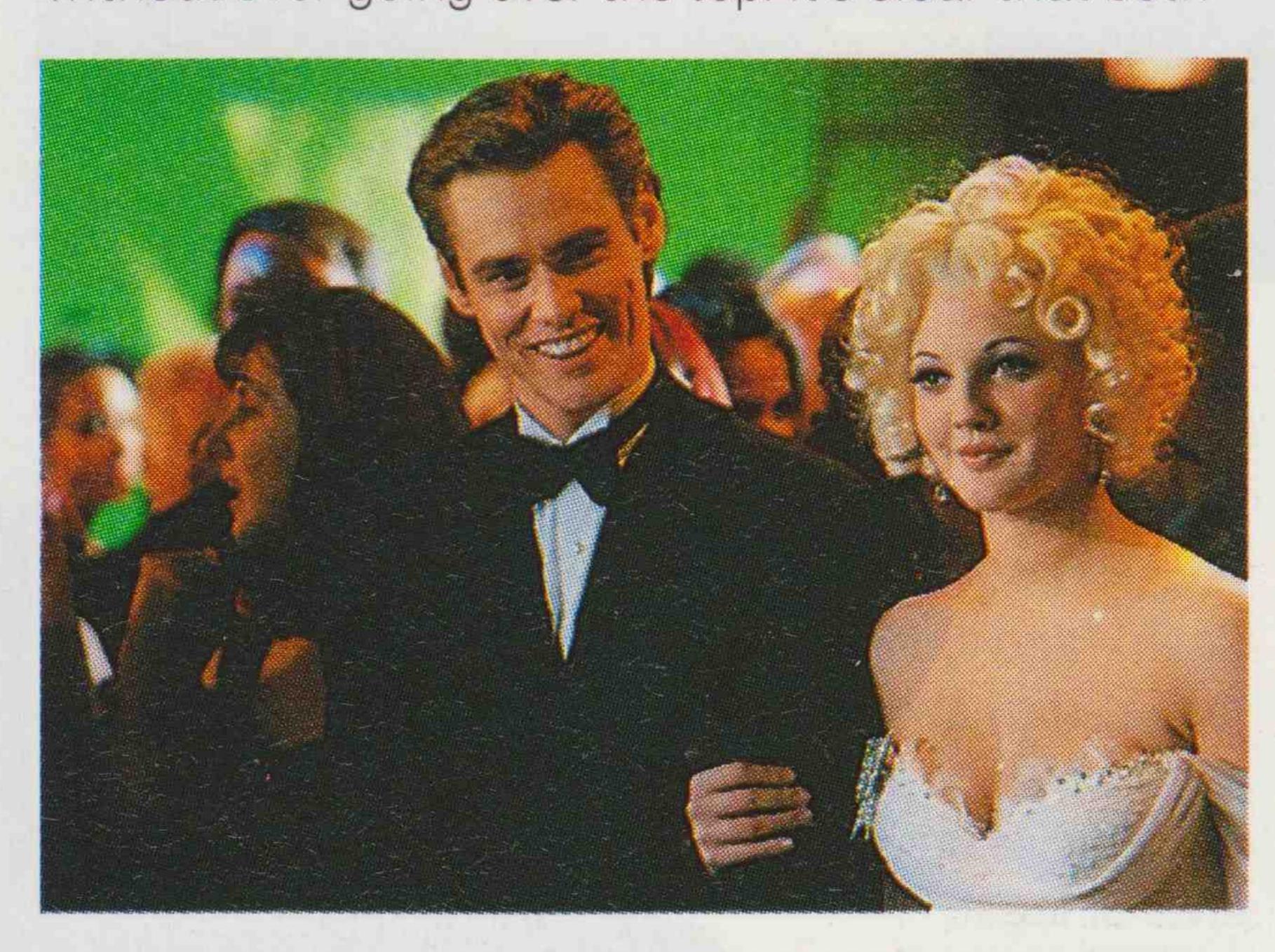
A little disconcertingly, the story kicks off with Batman's attempts to defuse a hostage crisis – instigated by nasty ol' Harvey Two-Face – which turns out to be a trap. There are two problems with this. First, Schumacher is a terrific director, but he really can't handle action sequences – he uses far too many quick cuts, to the extent that it's sometimes difficult to tell precisely who's doing what, and to whom. This is a recurring fault throughout the film, albeit the only major one.

The second problem is that the audience, replete with memories of Burton's gloomily gothic brace of flicks, will be unprepared for the sheer tongue-in-cheek glee of Schumacher's take on the character. Imagine if Indiana Jones' first two outings had been serious Rider Haggard tales: How would you have reacted to *The Last Crusade?*

You see, what Schumacher has done, improbably enough, is to successfully combine the original Tim Burton/Frank Miller-style Dark Knight with the OTT camp hero of the '60s TV series. "It'll never work!" you cry. But it does, I assure you. Oh come on – you've seen the U2 video, with a straight-faced Val Kilmer asserting "It's the car. Chicks love the car." Well, that's the level of confidence that Schumacher brings to the whole thing, aided by a witty script from Lee Batchler, Janet Scott Batchler and Akiva Goldsman.

Unlike the simple di-and trichotomies of Batman and Batman Returns, Batman Forever presents us with an ensemble cast, and uniformly excellent performances. Representing the forces of naughtiness are current Hollywood golden boy Jim Carrey as Edward Nygma, aka The Riddler, and Oscar-winner Tommy Lee Jones as Harvey Dent, aka Two-Face. E Nygma is a former employee of Wayne Enterprises whose experiments with brainwaves lead to the development of a completely interactive, highly addictive TV system. He teams up with acid-scarred former district attorney Dent for a crime-spree which will enable him to market his invention and eventually ruin Bruce Wayne. In return, he will help Two-Face defeat Batman.

Carrey was born to play both the eccentric Edward Nygma and his camp alter-ego The Riddler, contorting his face and body into geometric puzzles. How can one man have so many knees? (Incidentally, let us thank assorted gods that Robin Williams didn't get the role, and ruin it with his desperately unfunny histrionics.) Similarly, Jones is superbly deranged as the schizoid Two-Face, but without ever going over the top. It's clear that both

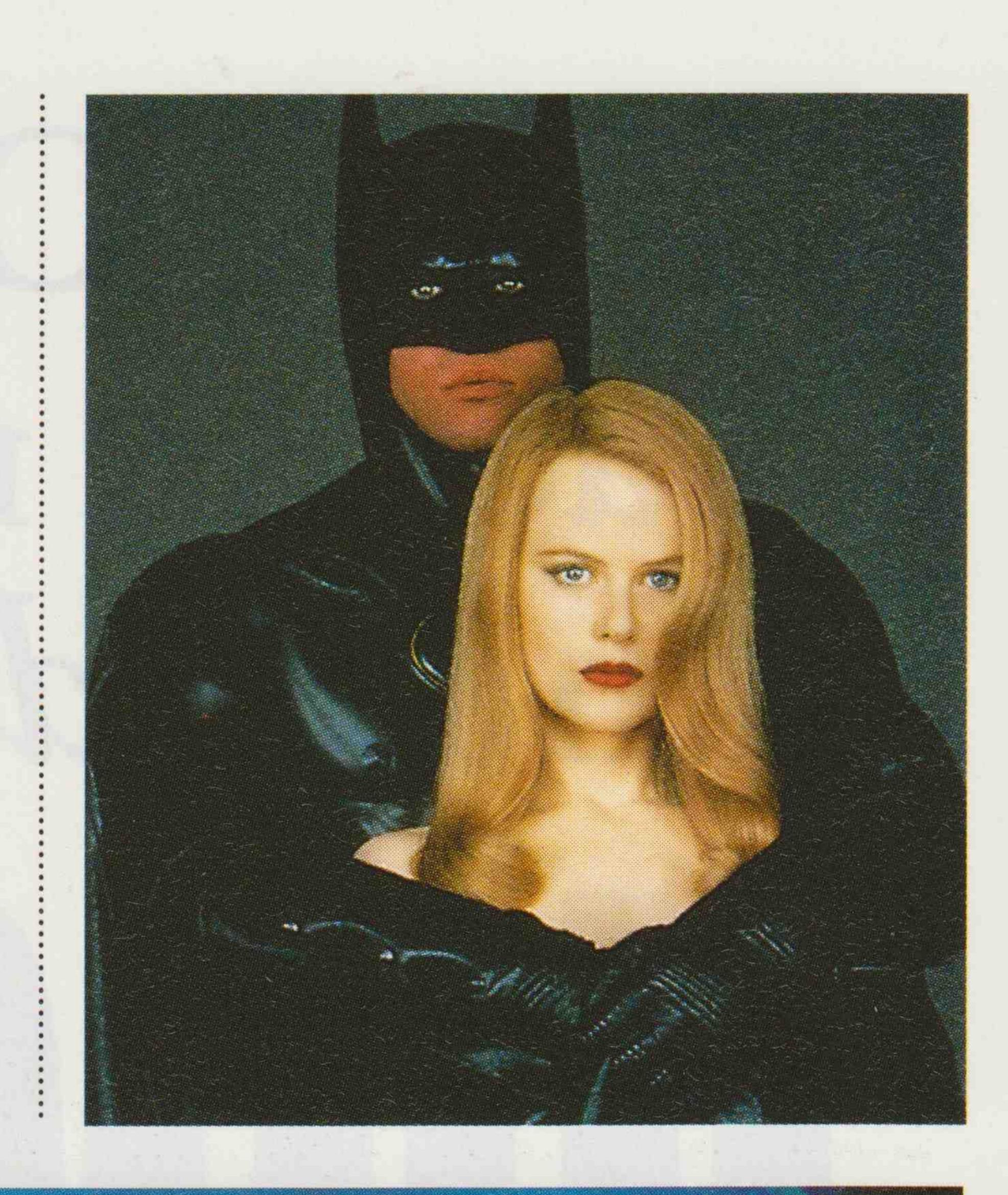


E Nygma (Jim Carrey) and Sugar (Drew Barrymore) celebrate the launch of Nygma's brain gizmo.



(Left) Jim
Carrey as
Edward
Nygma
builds a
mind-control
device out
of a foodblender...

(Right)
Batman
(Val Kilmer)
and love
interest
Chase
Meridan
(Nicole
Kidman)





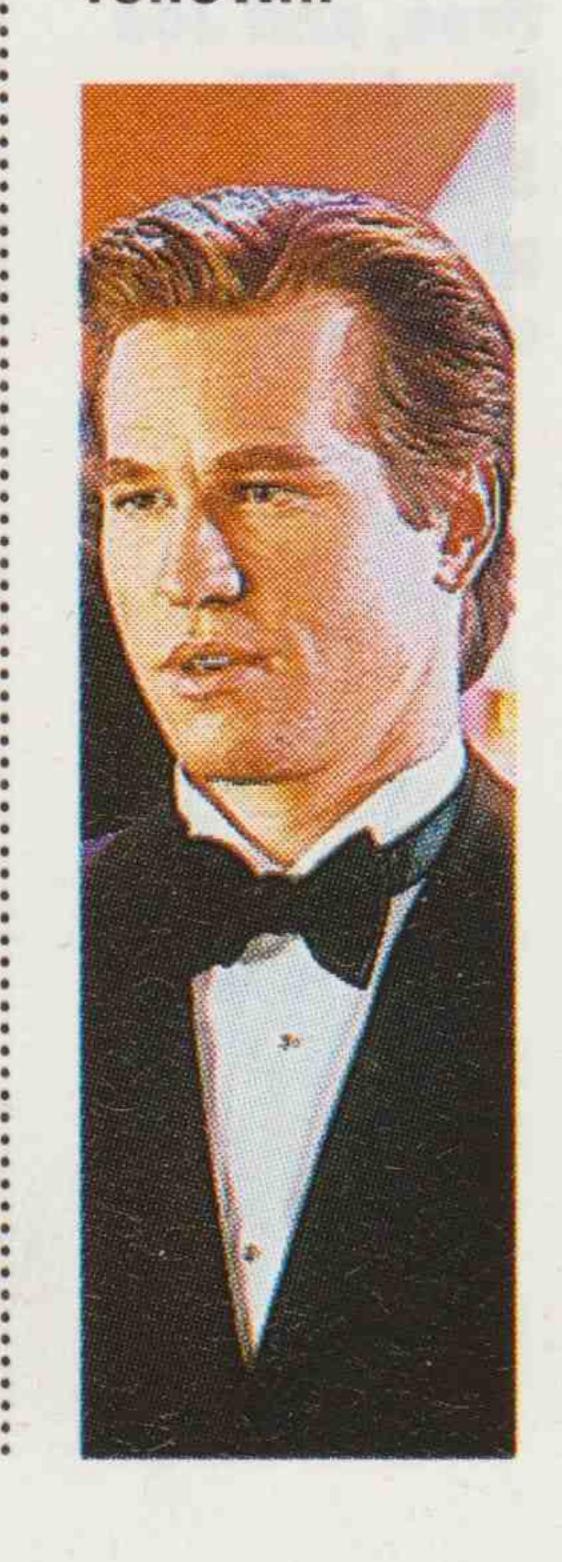
actors had not just a whale of a time making this film, but an entire school of cetaceans.

Opposing them is Val Kilmer, who invests more character into Bruce Wayne/Batman than Michael Keaton ever did. The central storyline deals with him finally coming to terms with his superhero identity and exorcising the memories of his parents' deaths, aided by psychologist and love interest Chase Meridian (Nicole Kidman) and boy wonder Robin (Chris O'Donnell). Meridian, whose lovely, long, billowing hair makes her look like something out of a shampoo advert, is attracted to Batman, but not Bruce Wayne, who has the hots for her. Except she doesn't realise they're one and the same. It's Lois & Clark all over again!

As for O'Donnell's Robin, he's one of the most pleasant surprises of the film, being neither a whinging adolescent nor a smart-alec kid genius. A superb acrobat and member of trapeze troupe The Flying Graysons, he sees his parents and brother killed during Two-Face's unsuccessful attempt to locate Batman at a charity circus event, and promptly swears vengeance. Bruce Wayne takes him under his wing and, when Dick Grayson discovers his secret, Wayne tries (unsuccessfully) to persuade him not to follow the same path.

The supporting players are as good as the leads too. Even Two-Face's henchwomen Sugar and

Val Kilmer in a tuxedo: We never knew he was such a dashing fellow...



Spice (Drew Barrymore and Debi Mazar) aren't there for just glamorous decoration. And an audience chorus of "Not Alfred!" is guaranteed when the villains' gang knock down Michael Gough's venerable butler.

The production design is also stunning, replacing the film *trés noir* look of the previous two movies with a plethora of giant statues and enormous office blocks. It's like DW Griffith's *Intolerance* without the elephants! The sleek lines of the old batvehicles have been replaced by a new batmobile, batplane and batboat, which all look far more like, well, bats. And Edward Nygma's mind-control box, the prototype of which is built from a food-blender, becomes bigger and more commercial as his business progresses, but never stops looking like a blender.

There's no getting away from it — Batman Forever is cool and very satisfying, but only when you understand how Schumacher is treating his subject. Dark Knight purists may hate it, but to those who liked both the films and the TV series, this is an effective combination of both. If you ignore the badly composed action scenes and let yourself get carried along on by the batmania, you'll come out of the cinema aching to see what Schumacher (we hope) will do with the character in Batman 4.

